

Jailing Perils African Magazine

By Anthony Astrachan

Washington Post Foreign Service

KAMPALA, Uganda, Jan. 30—Africa's best magazine is dying of a missing heart.

The magazine, a combination of Ramparts and the New Republic, is called Transition. The heart it cannot live without is Rajat Neogy, who founded it in 1961 and has been its editor since.

He made it irreverent and radical, often witty and sometimes wise, a channel for certain currents of hip, cool and soul in a continent that often manages to be black and square at the same time.

He made it a voice for democracy and dissent in Uganda. This country once had perhaps the freest press in Africa—and perhaps the most disparate set of component parts. That freedom is being reshaped in the process of building one nation from the components; many Westerners would say it is being battered out of shape.

The dissent went too far for the Uganda government. Neogy has been tried for sedition for printing a letter critical of President Milton Obote, and now awaits judgment, expected Saturday. He has also been detained under a law that allows imprisonment without trial to preserve public security, so that even if he is acquitted, he may not be freed.

If he is released, he will

News Analysis

probably be deported, since the government has ruled, on a technicality, that he is not a Uganda citizen even though he was born here when the country was a British protectorate.

Neogy cannot edit Transition from jail. If he is expelled, he probably would not be able to find another African country in which he would have the freedom to publish Transition as he made it. Nobody else in Africa could combine the time and energy he gave to it with the magazine personality he created, and it would never be the same outside of Africa.

So Transition is dying. Subscribers have been told publication is being suspended.

The Uganda government insists there is no ban on Transition and that anyone else is welcome to keep it going. It denies either guilt or contributory negligence in the death of the magazine.

Transition survived an earlier blow, the revelation in 1966 that its financial angel, the Congress for Cultural Freedom, was the recipient of CIA money. Neogy, 30, is as cosmopolitan as the editors of Paris Review, as bohemian as the editors of the East Village Other, but more responsible,

though not what you would call the CIA type.

The Congress was replaced by the International Association for Cultural Freedom, financed by the Ford Foundation.

It flourished when an issue presenting arguments by both sides in the Nigerian Civil war was banned in Nigeria. At the Addis Ababa peace talks last August, Nigerians and Biafrans were united in their determination to snap up copies.

Transition's contributions from Nigeria and Ghana and its 12,000 circulation made it one of the few bridges between East and West Africa. Some readers feel an article three years ago on the overthrow of Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was the start of the Uganda government's irritation at Transition. Nkrumah was a hero to many Ugandan leaders.

The magazine seriously undermined its standing with Obote and his government with a number of articles criticizing Uganda's 1967 constitution though it also printed major defenses of the constitution.

Other irritants were an article of East African Asians (of whom Neogy is one) asserting that Uganda's treatment of them was little better than Kenya's and one on student contempt for East African cabinet ministers.

Readers outside Uganda remember Transition more for articles like "Tarzan Is

an Expatriate," which pushed to hilarious extremes the idea that whites get the same kick out of modern Africa that Tarzan did. They shared "an active curiosity in things strange . . . and an unconscious desire to stop thinking and let the body take over," with the whites treating the "natives" at Tarzan did the animals.

The article drew scores of letters, including one from the vice president of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., in Tarzana, Calif., citing chapter and verse to prove Tarzan was no racist in his dealings with animals.

Transition was one of a handful of institutions that made Kampala the intellectual capital of East Africa, and, while the Nigerian civil war rages, perhaps of all English-speaking Africa.

Among the others was the Nommo Art Gallery, founded by Mrs. Neogy (the beautiful daughter of American basketball coach Joe Lapchick). The gallery is not dying but may become malnourished. Another of these institutions is Makerere University College, the oldest school of higher education in East Africa and now part of the University of East Africa, whose faculty feel threatened by the detention of Neogy and Abu Mayanja. Mayanja is an opposition member of parliament who wrote the allegedly seditious letter.